

THE JEW IN LETTERS

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written about them. In 1290 (and again, finally, in 1540) the Jews were expelled from Apulia, in south Italy. Many of them ultimately found refuge in Corfu, where an independent Apulian Synagogue existed until our own day. With them they brought, not only their dialect, but also some of their religious poetry, written in Apulian though in Hebrew characters. These are among the oldest specimens of Apulian literature now extant.

The Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal with a refinement of cruelty at the close of the fifteenth century. Their descendants in the Balkans and North Africa still speak the Castilian of their fathers; and students of Spanish dialects and folk-lore find them a happy hunting-ground for a reconstruction of various facets of the life and literature of mediaeval Spain. Similarly, one might have imagined that Germany would have been proud of the tenacity of her Jewish children who, migrating Eastwards at the close of the Middle Ages, preserved in an alien land the German which their fathers had spoken in the Rhineland when the great Cathedral of Cologne was still building. Even the Arthurian romances and the Tales of the Round Table—which did not lack Jewish affinities—were familiar in the mediaeval Jewries and are extant in old Hebraic versions; while Sir Bevis of Hampton actually gave his name to a whole Ghetto cycle.

For the larger part of their literature, to be sure, the Jews used Hebrew, just as Christians used

Latin; and
for the same reasons. It was a semi-sacred
tongue; it
was universally read and understood,
irrespective of
national and linguistic boundaries; it was of
proper
scholastic status. But what they wrote in it
was to a
very considerable extent European in
conception. Hence
it happened that Jewish writers of the period
—Moses
Maimonides, Levi of Bagnols, Abraham ibn
Ezra—could
be translated into Latin and take their
place, easily and